

Intelligent design – your questions answered

by **Denyse O'Leary ARN correspondent**

What is intelligent design?

Intelligent design posits that design, along with chance and necessity, is part of the structure of nature. Design accounts for such features as the fine tuning of the universe and the high level of information in life forms. (The level of information present in life forms cannot be accounted for within the time frame of the Big Bang unless processes such as neo-Darwinian evolution are treated as a form of magic.)

Design is, as ex-atheist Antony Flew observed, consistent with the assumption that mind (Mind, if you like) comes first and creates matter, rather than the other way around. (In fact, that was why Flew stopped being an atheist.)

Does Darwinian evolution happen?

Evolution is certainly part of a process that includes design. That is why ID theorists William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells called their new book on evolution *The Design of Life*.

However - and this is critical - Darwinian evolution, as defended today, is an attempt to account for the history of life forms while ignoring design or treating it as an illusion . That is what the ID theorist disputes.

ID theorist Mike Behe points out in *The Edge of Evolution* that the actual progress of Darwinian evolution, as observed in the laboratory,

- 1) is much too slow to do what the Darwinist asserts, AND
- 2) to the extent that it plays a role in evolution, it usually works in the direction of simplification or debilitation of life forms, not in the direction of complexity and better function.

Its usual function has nothing to do with evolution toward more and higher functions but rather with keeping existing populations healthy by trimming poorly adapted variations.

The observed "powerful evidences" of evolution that are trotted out for the public are virtually always minor instances of adaptations. Claims about major transitions (from hippo to whale, et cetera) via Darwinian and related processes ignore the enormous simultaneous reengineering job that is required - and probably cannot have happened without design. But the public is shown only the "hippo's" change in form, not in internal structure.

Does intelligent design require belief in God?

The question of whether design requires a God is a little more complex. Design in the universe can be recognized apart from theism (belief in a *personal* God). Antony Flew is, for example, a deist, not a theist. That is, design in the universe convinces him that there is a mind/Mind behind the universe but he would not describe such a mind as a personal God. Albert Einstein appears to have held similar views.

Does atheism require a belief that there is no design?

It is important to distinguish between atheism in general and materialist atheism. Materialist atheism is by far the most popular type in the Western world today. The materialist atheist rules design out, not because there is strong evidence against it but because materialism cannot accommodate it. In other words, the materialist atheist denies design because he is a materialist (not necessarily because he is an atheist), and asserts that Darwinian evolution (and some related processes) can account fully for the high levels of information in life forms - rendering design an illusion.

But historically most atheists have not been materialists. Some Eastern religions are essentially atheistic but they recognize design. They account for it without invoking either the existence of a monotheistic God or the claim that design is merely an illusion.

How have different traditions accounted for design in the universe?

The question of design hinges on whether design in life forms is real or an illusion. If it is real, deism (an impersonal God) or theism (a personal God) is the explanation most Westerners adopt. Easterners may assume that we are all part of the cosmic Mind, that the universe itself functions as an intelligence, that the universe is a veil for that intelligence of which we are all a part, or that the Law or Way that describes the functioning of the universe is an impersonal force that acts in a way that we humans consider to be intelligence.

The ID theorist sees evolution as one of the factors in the design of life, which is a function of the design of the universe, which is best understood as a function of an intelligence behind the universe. How that intelligence is interpreted depends on the assumptions that the interpreter brings to the evidence.